

III. IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES AND ACTIONS

Implementing actions and accomplishments are summarized below, grouped under the CPO01084 contract requirement categories.

A. Implementation strategy and action plan

Based on extensive scoping among key contacts and stakeholders, we formulated a plan that provides for a prioritized and adaptive approach to implementing pilot projects. In February 2002, we convened a meeting of the Working Group members who remained available for consultation to assist in developing this plan. The plan, which we provided in March 2002 to Department of Lands and Board of Land Commissioners staff as well as to Working Group members, reflects updated circumstances regarding each of the projects recommended in the December 2000 Report and consensus support among the Working Group members.

B. Build a broader understanding among the people of Idaho and members of Congress regarding the pilot projects, and the need for implementation in Idaho.

We met or spoke with key Idaho Delegation and other Congressional staff and members in scoping for implementation and regarding individual pilot projects. We engaged in press interviews as well as meetings, calls, and other communications with a wide range of constituencies in providing an updated understanding of projects and needs. Our meetings and other efforts included:

- Idaho Forest Supervisors and other key U.S. Forest Service managers and staff;
- The Bureau of Land Management Deputy State Director and the Upper Snake River District Manager, in which the single pilot project that involves BLM-administered lands is located;
- Idaho Conservation League, Nature Conservancy, and other conservation community leaders;
- The Blue Ribbon Coalition (public lands motorized recreation and access);
- Idaho Forest Association, Idaho Cattle Association, Idaho Farm Bureau, and other industry representatives;
- Idaho Association of Counties officials and staff;

- North Central Idaho Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) public meetings in Elk City and Moscow;
- A meeting and other contacts with Nez Perce Tribe representatives;
- A meeting with a broad group of stakeholders and state and federal agency representatives at Priest Lake.
- Meetings with county, agency, and stakeholder representatives in the Twin Falls area.
- Interviews with newspapers in Sand Point, Lewiston, and Twin Falls and with other media.
- Assisting with Society of American Foresters testimony that included discussion of Idaho pilot project efforts at an April 2002 Congressional hearing on "charter forest" proposals;
- Discussion of the Working Group report and pilot projects at a February 2002 "forestry luncheon" presentation to Idaho state legislators, staff and interested public attendees.

C. Build the active support of educators, sportsmen groups, recreationists, industry, conservation and other interest groups.

As indicated above, we visited with proponents of each pilot project, representatives of industry, conservation, and other interest groups, state and federal legislators and agency officials, and other key individuals in scoping current issues and implementation priorities and regarding individual pilot projects. Our efforts in enlisting active support focused upon the projects that appeared most ready for implementation. A leading example of active support that has been achieved is the September 2000 resolution by the Idaho Association of Counties Public Lands Steering Committee, encouraging enactment of federal legislation adapted from the Clearwater Basin Stewardship Collaborative project (Appendix B).

D. Work with the Congressional delegation to develop draft federal legislation and a strategy for enactment.

We worked with the delegation to determine that an effort to enact authorization for all five pilot projects in a package at the present time is not realistic. The status of work on each of the five pilot projects in the Working Group Report is summarized below:

1. Clearwater Basin Stewardship Collaborative

Our scoping and strategy led us to ultimately focus our efforts on this project. We worked with the delegation as well as with proponents and other constituencies to develop and refine draft legislation to implement concepts and address needs identified in this project, in an updated, realistic structure.

This effort has progressed to the introduction of the Clearwater Basin Project Act, H.R. 5629, by Rep. Butch Otter on October 10, 2002. A copy of the bill, Rep. Otter's press release and a short summary of its provisions are attached to this report (Appendices C, D, E). A copy of the bill and press release have also been posted on the Board and Task Force websites.

Strategy for further development of this legislation leading to enactment and implementation of this pilot project must remain adaptive to events in the Congress and continued comment and other participation by various constituencies. However, the introduced bill has received positive press. In the event that appropriations are made available in an omnibus appropriations bill for fiscal year 2003, introduction of H.R. 5629 positions the project for favorable consideration. H.R. 5629 otherwise places the project to receive further consideration in Congress by early 2003. The bill also provides a template for additional pilot project proposals or broader authorization of pilots.

2. Central Idaho Ecosystem Trust

We developed rough draft federal legislation that provides for projects derived from the CIET recommendations in the Working Group report, but at a smaller geographic scale and otherwise adapted to facilitate successful enactment and implementation. This proposal has been vetted in concept with conservation group leaders as well as other constituencies and among key Congressional and Bush Administration policy-makers. However, it requires further work, particularly at the local level, before being ready for further Congressional consideration.

3. Priest Lake Basin Cooperative Project

Following up on a promise made by Working Group representatives last year, we met in March 2002 with a broad spectrum of local stakeholders and agency officials to allay concerns about this project and facilitate adapting or reformulating it to achieve local consensus. Proponents and other constituents appear to agree that revision of this project is needed through work at the local level before it is further considered for implementation. Implementation of the Lakeface Lamb Stewardship Project is proceeding in the same general area as the proposed Cooperative Project and local

constituents are monitoring its progress in relation to some of the same resource issues as those addressed in the Cooperative Project.

4. St. Joe Ecosystem Stewardship Project

This project can be implemented in large part through relatively straightforward extension of existing Forest Service stewardship contract authority to accommodate additional specific contracting projects on the St. Joe District of the Idaho Panhandle National Forest. We coordinated with local proponents and the Forest Service to obtain updated information regarding specific candidate stewardship contract projects or a level of authorization to incorporate into a legislative or administrative vehicle for implementation. However, more local information is needed to further proceed. Some current concerns regarding stewardship contracting expressed by conservation groups may need to be further addressed for successful implementation.

5. Twin Falls/Cassia Resource Enhancement Trust

As indicated above, we have met with federal land managers, local stockmen and interested stakeholders concerned with the Twin Falls/Cassia County area encompassed by this project. This area suffers from several problems associated with federal land management, many of which are tied to a mix of Forest Service and BLM administered lands in the area, and the related split of responsibility between the agencies. There are valid and pressing concerns about these issues that are directly tied to the economic and cultural stability of ranching enterprises, families and communities. These concerns rise to the level of Idaho losing important heritage and ways of life that have been established over the past hundred years.

Further negotiation with Forest Service and BLM officials and among local constituencies is needed to craft a specific legislative and/or administrative mechanism to successfully implement a pilot project. However, we have identified at least two components from the project proposal described in the Working Group Report that we believe should be pursued: 1) designating a single federal land manager to oversee the project area, through interchange of personnel between agencies or other agreement to better consolidate and coordinate administration; 2) establishing a local stakeholder advisory board, for enhanced interaction by local land stewards with the federal agencies and other interested parties. Such a board could be modeled after the advisory group described in H.R. 5629 for the Clearwater Basin project.

Trust land concepts remain worthy of consideration for this pilot project. The Valles Caldera Trust underway in New Mexico, further described below, may provide some useful insights and precedent. We believe that additional federal funding will need to

be solicited for use over at least the next several years to address such resource issues as juniper intrusion, noxious weeds, and wildfire threat.

E. Coordinate Idaho's efforts with similar efforts across the country.

We have tracked and coordinated with numerous other pilot project, forest health, and other efforts. Our objective has been to maintain reasonable consistency and utilize where appropriate momentum, experience, and other opportunities presented in other programs and projects. The other efforts that we have tracked and coordinated with include:

- The "charter forest" proposal included in the President's Fiscal Year 2003 proposed budget documents in February 2002. This proposal has remained conceptual and preliminary thus far, but encompasses ideas that are consistent with Idaho pilot project proposals.
- Efforts to create a Forest Service "Region 7" umbrella structure for authorizing and implementing charter forest or other national forest pilot projects, led by Daniel Kemmis of the Center for the Rocky Mountain West in Missoula. This effort also has not progressed beyond the conceptual stage and preliminary discussion with Idaho Congressional delegation staff, but could present an opportunity for bipartisan support to facilitate pilot projects nationally, including Idaho.
- The National Fire Plan 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan, approved in May 2002 by western governors and federal agencies, in collaboration with counties, state foresters, and tribes. The Implementation Plan calls for collaborative approaches to developing and implementing projects to reduce threats to communities and ecosystems from catastrophic wildfires.
- The June 2002 Forest Service report, *The Process Predicament: How Statutory, Regulatory and Administrative Factors Affect National Forest Management*. This report confirms that the "gridlock" problems described in the Task Force and Working Group Reports persist and continue to contribute to decline in forest health in Idaho and other western states.
- The National Environmental Policy Act ("NEPA") streamlining task force effort, announced in a July 2002 Federal Register Notice by the President's Council on Environmental Quality. The State of Idaho submitted comments in response to this notice that recommended consideration of pilot projects such as those in the Working Group Report in NEPA reform efforts.

- The President's "Forest Health Initiative" announced in August 2002 and subsequent legislative proposals for implementation. The initiative calls for collaborative approaches to implementing the National Fire Plan. It also calls for streamlining of NEPA and other regulatory procedures for fuel reduction and other vegetation management projects aimed at ecosystem restoration and catastrophic fire risk reduction on Forest Service and BLM administered lands.
- Other forest restoration/catastrophic wildfire legislation pending in the Congress. These include various proposed amendments to the Senate appropriations bill for the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies, and H.R. 5319 in the House. H.R. 5319, in the form recently reported out of the House Resources Committee, would enact a compromise approach to fuels reduction and other forest health projects with attendant NEPA and appeals and litigation streamlining measures.
- Forest Service stewardship contracting projects, including the Lakeface Lamb and Iron Honey projects (Idaho Panhandle National Forest), the Meadow Face project (Nez Perce National Forest), and the North Kennedy/Cottonwood Project (Boise National Forest). The seven-year Lakeface Lamb contract has been awarded and is in the process of being implemented. The Iron Honey project is the subject of a lawsuit recently filed by environmental groups. The Meadow Face project is nearing a Forest Service decision regarding approval. The North Kennedy/Cottonwood project remains in the NEPA process.
- The Valles Caldera Trust, operating in New Mexico to manage 100,000 acres of newly purchased federal lands as a "national preserve" component of the national forest system, pursuant to federal legislation enacted in 2000. The Valles Caldera Trust is the only operating effort to manage national forest lands that is comparable in at least some ways to the Idaho pilot project proposals that incorporate a trust approach.
- The Quincy Library Group Project. This project began as a promising collaborative approach to implementing a fuels reduction/firebreak strategy on national forest lands in the Sierra Nevada region of California. However, due to competing Forest Service strategies and endangered species, funding and other issues, the project has become the subject of conflict and delay, including appeals and litigation. It is being implemented at a scale and pace that proponents assert is far smaller and slower than what is required to be effective.
- The Collaborative Forest Restoration Program, operating on national forest and adjoining lands in New Mexico under the Community Forest Restoration Act of 2000 (Title V, Public Law 106-393). This program authorizes and provides for funding and implementation of specific wildfire threat reduction, ecosystem

restoration and similar activities determined through a collaborative process. The program criteria emphasize consensus decision-making, use of small diameter trees, creating forest-related local employment, compliance with all federal and state environmental laws, and multi-party monitoring and assessment. In 2001, a total of \$4.7 million in funding and 18 relatively small-scale fuel reduction and other projects were approved under this program. Each of these activities are being implemented or moving towards implementation, according to reports. In 2002 a total of \$4.5 million in funding for 15 additional projects has been recommended and is awaiting final release.

IV. RECOMMENDED FURTHER IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

The introduction of the Clearwater Basin Project Act in Congress represents a significant milestone towards implementation of one or more pilot projects to test concepts and address needs identified in the Task Force and Working Group Reports. Other substantial progress in implementing recommendations in the Working Group Report has been attained. However, much work remains to be done for a Clearwater Basin pilot project to actually happen "on the ground," and for any additional projects to be ready for implementation. We recommend that at least the following additional steps be pursued during the coming year:

- 1. Clearwater Basin Project Act.** Support further public comment and other participation regarding refinement and enactment of H.R. 5629, the Clearwater Basin Project Act. This could include support for and participation in a hearing and other steps towards enactment in the Congress. It could also include consideration of a joint resolution by the Idaho State Legislature in support of enactment.
- 2. Twin Falls/Cassia County Project.** Support further work with the Forest Service, BLM and local constituents towards legislation and/or administrative actions to implement a workable pilot project reflecting concepts and needs identified in the Twin Falls/Cassia County Resource Enhancement Trust project.
- 3. Other specific pilot projects.** Support similar further work towards implementing one or more pilot projects adapted to current circumstances from the St. Joe Ecosystem Stewardship, Central Idaho Ecosystem Trust, and Priest Lake Cooperative project proposals, to the extent that local support for such projects persists.

4. Broader pilot project authorization and funding. Support further exploration and pursuit of more general pilot project authorization and funding legislation. Such legislation would provide criteria and a process for additional projects to be implemented without further specific federal legislation. The "charter forest" and "Region 7" concepts are potential platforms, but there may be other suitable vehicles in the upcoming Congress.

5. Continued coordination. Support other continued coordination with similar efforts nationwide. The concept of pilot programs or projects to test alternative approaches to federal land management has garnered national interest and momentum. Support for broader reform of federal lands "gridlock" has also grown substantially over the past year, particularly in relation to catastrophic fire risk and related forest health issues. There are pilot efforts in the process of implementation such as the Valles Caldera Trust that could yield valuable insights for Idaho projects. There are proposals currently under consideration by the Administration and Congress of varying character and breadth that could address issues identified in the Task Force and Working Group Reports. Idaho pilot project proposals are likely to otherwise benefit from coordination with related or comparable pending legislation and other efforts.